

limbo

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Henry Samuel Levinson (1949-2010)

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Henry Samuel Levinson nació en Estados Unidos (Cincinnati, Ohio). Se graduó en la Universidad de Stanford y se doctoró en la de Princeton (1976). Desde 1982 fue profesor de Estudios Religiosos en la Universidad de Carolina del Norte (Greensboro), donde ejerció además como decano del College of Arts and Sciences y director del Center for Critical Inquiry in the Liberal Arts. En su honor la universidad estableció en 1998 la Levinson Lecture in Jewish Studies. Entre sus escritos destacan *The Religious Investigations of William James* (1981) y *Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life* (1992).

En su libro sobre Santayana, el profesor Levinson propone una vuelta a Santayana como modo de reinterpretar la historia de la filosofía norteamericana. Así, frente al pragmatismo de John Dewey, defendido por Sidney Hook, Levinson reivindica una tradición que se remontaría a William James, también pragmatista pero sensible a cuestiones como: la soledad, el humor, la impotencia, la religión, la vida espiritual, la desacralización de la democracia, la contingencia, el ocio, la ironía. Frente al naturalismo antisobrenaturalista, Levinson defiende un naturalismo no reductivo abierto a lo religioso. A Santayana lo califica como *naturalista pragmático* y *naturalista religioso*, por entender que sus críticas al pragmatismo afectan sólo a la versión deweyana y al anteponer la influencia de James o Emerson en Santayana a sus críticas a la religión o a la tradición. De ahí que el profesor Levinson se sienta más cómodo analizando al Santayana poeta, en el contexto de “the high tradition of aesthetic spirituality” (p. 36), o destacando el aspecto provocativo y festivo de *Scepticism*

and Animal Faith que, por ejemplo, ante su eclecticismo filosófico o ante *Dominations and Powers*, libro del que escribe que “is a seriously flawed work” (p. 270). Levinson destaca, en definitiva, el aspecto festivo, cómico y sonriente de Santayana, frente al Santayana de otros estudiosos, que resulta más trágico. Véase por ello su presentación de *Scepticism and Animal Faith*:

There is no more provocative or finely drawn piece of festive soliloquy in Santayana’s whole corpus than *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, the work that he published in 1923 to introduce his own natural comedy, *Realms of Being*. The book begins with a preface that must have appeared almost adolescent in its satirical playfulness to mainline Anglo-American philosophers now in “the Age of Russell”.

Realists and naturalists in the United States generally characterized *Scepticism and Animal Faith* as a definitive statement of Santayana’s critical realism. They pictured it as Santayana’s effort to provide the epistemological nuts and bolts for the naturalistic ontology that would follow in *Realms of Being*. In particular, they construed it as an attempt to sweep modern philosophy clean of metaphysics by establishing a naturalistic theory of knowledge linking mind to the world.

But, to my mind, this is a weak misreading of *Scepticism*, a book that opens up with Santayana’s unforgettably disarming phrase, “Here is one more system of philosophy” (*SAF*, v). He expects his reader to presume not “one more” but one better, something like the final word. Indeed, he expects his readership to judge that if it is just “one more”, then it is no better than the rest, another king without any clothes. Thus his second sentence: “If the reader is tempted to smile, I can assure him that I smile with him” because “my system—to which this volume is an introduction—differs widely in spirit and pretensions from what usually goes by that name” (*SAF*, v).

More than likely, his readers were not looking for “pretensions” because, from the vantage point of Anglo-American philosophers in the 1920s, pretension is a disease that epistemology is deployed to cure. But Santayana is calling that usual view a pretension and, moreover,

he is admitting that his own philosophical “system” involves pretension. He is pretending he is playing, he is delivering his festive meta-communication: THIS IS PLAY. (...)

In a sense, then, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, published when Santayana is sixty, announces that his last “system” will be a departure, not simply from this or that sort of modern philosophy, but from modern philosophy altogether. He not only disavows the dominant projects of contemporary philosophers by poking fun at their pretensions, but also implies his “meditations” should be taken as pretense, as a sort of play. (...).

To understand the role that skepticism *does* play for Santayana, it is important to place it in the festive framework for philosophy that he establishes in *Soliloquies*, particularly his piece on “Carnival”. *Scepticism and Animal Faith* narrates a ritual process that, like many other similar rites, gets articulated in four segments: first, one in which the playful or imaginative status of the proceeding is communicated (*Scepticism’s* preface); second, one that separates the celebrant from his normal, social sense of self, fraught as it is with particular spiritual disorders (the book’s skeptical exercises); third, one that permits an avowal of humankindness that carries with it a renewed sense of well-being (Santayana’s confession of animal faith); and, finally, one that restores him to normal social life, feeling spiritually reawakened (his eventual embrace of common sense) [*Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, Londres, 1992, pp. 205-209].